

# **Indian Rose Annual - IRA 1980**

## **Vermillion Rose – Past, Present and Future**

M. S. Viraraghavan

One of the most popular colours in roses is vermillion orange — the colour of the pomegranate flower. In fact, such is its popularity that hybridisers have evolved a bewildering variety of every shades of vermillion ranging from rich dark shades verging on scarlet red to the most subtle tints of salmon. But amidst this diversity we may tend to forget that this range of colour is of a comparatively recent date.

Basically, the vermillion colour is derived from the pigment, pelargonidin. The genes for production of this pigment, arose by a chance mutation — earlier roses lacked vermillion because the standard rose pigment, cyanidin, can produce colours only in the red and pink shades. The first roses with pelargonidin colours were the sports Gloria Mundi (1929) and Paul Krampel (1930), both derived from the famous polyantha, Orleans Rose. A similar mutation which arose a little later when the hybrid Moschata Eva (Kordes 1933) was crossed with a red H. T. led to the production of the Floribunda, Baby Chateau (Kordes, 1936) which was destined to play a definitive role in the evolution of roses—for the cross Baby Chateau x Crimson Glory led to the production of the first Vermillion H. T. Independence •—and many subsequent developments in this line originate from that variety, which combines a striking new colour with the genes of that most famous of red roses, Crimson Glory.

The opportunity afforded by the appearance of such a startling colour break as Independence, (still after 30 years one of the most striking of roses)

and its progenitors Eva and Baby Chateau, was eagerly seized by many eminent hybridisers — Kordes himself (Germany), his famous compatriot Tantau, Meilland (France), McGredy (U.K.), Boerner (USA) and a host of others throughout the world. Progress was achieved almost simultaneously in two directions towards an ideal of a large flowered vermillion H.T., and towards a better vermillion Floribunda.

As you would have noticed from the parentage, Independence, itself derived from a cross between H.T. and a Floribunda, does not fall strictly into either category, and is in fact regarded variously as H.T., Floribunda or Floribunda/H.T. type in different countries.

Taking the developments on the H.T. side first, hybridisers have been attempting to increase the flower size, while at the same time eliminating the objectionable features of the new strain, for instance, the tendency of the colour to fade or blue in an unaesthetic manner.

A famous series of crosses by Meilland, between Peace and Independence and Happiness and Independence, led to notable success in this direction. Roses like Soraya, orange red, reverse crimson, (Peace x Floradora x Grandmere Jenny), 1954; Allegro, also geranium red (Happiness x Independence x Soraya), 1962, were among his most famous early vermillion roses. Till recently Baccara was the most popular cut flower variety in this colour and was superseded only in the 70's by Meilland's own Inter-flora (also called Interview 1970), and thereafter by the salmon Sonia (1970).

But even more significant advances were made by Tantau. While initially he also started with Baby Chateau, a Floribunda Alpine Glow was also used, as well as a series of crosses involving various species, such as *Rosa roxburghii*. One of the most important parent roses raised by Tantau (in shades of cinnabar red) was the Floribunda Floradora (Baby Chateau x *R. roxburghii*). Floradora was the base for the evolution of the Grandiflora class of

roses. The premier seedling of this series was Queen Elizabeth (Charlotte Armstrong x Floradora) but more important from the point of view of this article is the famous pinkish vermillion H.T, Montezuma (Fandango x Floradora), Swim, 1955. This remains till today one of the best roses for a warm tropical climate. Coming back to Tantau's own line of research, the climax was reached with Super Star — its colour derives from Alpine Glow, and flower form, size and vigour from Peace and is till today, the supreme development in this colour. I still remember the incredulous surprise with which I and so many other visitors to the 1960 Delhi Rose Show gazed at Super Star when it was exhibited, perhaps, for the first time in India.

The originator of Independence, Kordes, was meanwhile working steadily towards slightly different goals and, as a result of his efforts, we have roses like Colour Wonder, salmon orange with paler reverse (Perfecta x Super star) 1964, which have proved a virtual gold-mine for hybridisers.

Apart from Super Star, the next land-mark in the development of vermillion roses was again by Tantau when he produced Fragrant Cloud in 1964. The full parentage of this extra-ordinary variety, which combines a lovely flower form with a colour ranging from geranium red to coral red, and perhaps one of the most exquisite of rose perfumes, has not been revealed, but it is obviously a seedling in the same Super Star strain to which has been combined Peace blood via Prima Ballerina. This, and its close relative, Duke of Windsor, which is slightly more orange, still remain as the acme of fragrant vermillion coloured roses — though, unfortunately, the disease resistance is not really what it should be.

The second mainstream of progress in vermillion roses was towards better Floribundas with an emphasis on. those with H.T. form. The significant break in this line was Fashion (Boerner 1949), involving a cross between the Floribunda Pinocchio and the H.T., Crimson Glory, Pinocchio is derived like

Baby Chateau from Eva. From Fashion, Boerner got Spartan (1955) by crossing it with Geranium Red.

The opportunity afforded by Spartan was seized by McGredy to produce a series of beautiful Floribundas in the same colour range including varieties like Flamengo (Cinnabar x Spartan) 1960, Mischief (Peace x Spartan) 1961, Elizabeth Of Glamis (Spartan x Highlight) 1965, City of Leeds (Evelyn Fison x Spartan x Seedling) 1966, Irish Mist (Orangeade x Mischief) 1966, and innumerable ethers.

McGredy also utilized the independence strain to produce better Floribundas, starting with Orangeade (Orange Sweetheart x Independence), 1959.

Other hybridisers, like Kordes himself, were not lagging behind: Korona (Kordes 1955), Highlight (Robinson 1957) and Dickson's Flame (Independence Seedling x Nymph) by Dickson, 1958 deserve mention.

Thus, by the early 60's, a very high standard had been reached both in H.T.'s and Floribundas. Thereafter, constant efforts to further improve the strain were made. One of the earliest successes was Gregory's Summer Holiday (Super Star x Unknown) 1967, which is still a very good rose for India.

Tantau, himself, has striven hard to better Super Star and his Elida (1966) and Love Story (1973) are obvious attempts. But alas, at least in Hyderabad conditions, they appear more as steps backward. Likewise, efforts to better Fragrant Cloud in the H.T. range have not prospered. But, Fragrant Cloud has helped to produce good roses in other colours.

Others, who have built up on the Super Star/Fragrant Cloud H.T. strain are Harkness with Alexander (1972) too thin a flower for warm climates,

Lindquist with Command Performance (1970), Kordes with Feuerzauber (1974) — a lovely flower, but an indifferent grower in Hyderabad, and Dickson with Coalite Flame, (1974), one of the largest of the vermillion roses but with a tendency to produce split centres. In the U.S., Warriner has introduced Futura (1974), but this again is hardly an advance, at least as far as India is concerned. On the floribunda side too, there have been repeated efforts to improve, including a series of dwarf vermillions exemplified by Tantau's Topsy (Fragrant Cloud x Fire Signal) and Le Grice's Warrior (1977). A series of vermillion Floribundas of startling brilliance have been introduced by McGredy beginning with City of Belfast (1968) and continuing through to Trumpeter (1976) and Captain Cook (1977). Ginger Snap (Delbard 1978) and Memento (Dickson, 1978) must also be noted.

A further approach to the breeding of vermillion roses involves the use of Colour Wonder, and one of the most spectacular successes is Cocker's floribunda Anne Cocker (Highlight x Colour Wonder, 1970). I should also mention the Grandiflora Prominent (Colour Wonder x Zorina). But ultimately the conclusion remains that the triumphant march achieved in the 50's and early 60's has not been maintained. I particularly refer to progress in H.T.'s. But there are many contenders such as Dora (Gaujard, 1975) Corso (Cocker 1976), Margaret Trudeau (McGredy 1976), Cayenne (Warriner 1977), Raja Surinder Singh (Dr. Pal, 1977), Ambassador and Alpha (Meilland, 1978).

Perhaps a more sophisticated approach is needed. Concentration has been very much on the obvious. While undoubtedly vermillion is a striking colour, a certain danger is inherent in merely striving for brighter and brighter shades. Beyond a point the eye of the beholder is satiated rather than elated by the unceasing stream of scarlet roses. Further, much needs to be done to improve the health of the strain, particularly of the H.T.'s. Super Star, apart from an ungainly habit of growth, has become noticeably subject to mildew and Fragrant Cloud was always addicted to Black-spot — and these defects

are disconcertingly repeated in their progeny. Of course, while the stream of strident vermillion roses (perhaps meant as potboilers), continues unabated, the more discerning hybridisers have not been slow to realise the necessity for a modified approach. The eminent English hybridiser, Le Grice, has been trying to marry the bright vermillion hues with the lilac brown range, and has produced a series of beautiful roses—floribundas like Tom Brown, Saturn Red (1964), and Vesper, mars orange, (1961); IARI's lovely brownish orange Mohini represents a further step in this evolution — that of a vermillion verging on a golden brown rose. But as yet, no typical H.T. has appeared.

One of the most exciting prospects in rose breeding is what is referred to by Dr. Pal in his "Roses in India" the possibility of combining genes for the production — of vermillion colour, with the genes for dark yellow — (from a technical angle, one is an anthocyanin pigment, the other, carotenoid).

Roses like Tantau's Whisky Mac (Bronze orange), Poulsen's Troika (bronze) and Tantau's Janina (vermillion reverse yellow), are efforts towards this goal. But the supreme achievement so far, is in my opinion, the floribunda Belinda (Tantau 1972). Its flowers of golden vermillion are as described in the American Rose Annual 1972, a colour between that of a lemon and an orange, can be quite breathtaking. But no large size H.T. is yet in sight.

The next refinement in vermillion roses is the bicolour one — vermillion reverse white or yellow. Examples of the advances in this range, generally derived from Colour Wonder, are McGredy's 'Matangi' — one of the "handpainted" strain, (bright vermillion with white reverse and white markings), Kordes' Folklore (Salmon orange with white reverse) and Decorat (Vermillion with a hint of yellow). But the direct successor to Super Star and Fragrant Cloud — a lovely disease resistant vermillion H.T., of exquisite form, fragrance, and substance—still remains a dream.

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